

Karma Nirvana’s Reflections on the 2024 Home Office HBA Data Release

Karma Nirvana welcomes the Home Office publication of the 2024 data on Honour-Based Abuse (HBA) offences recorded by police forces across England and Wales. However, we are deeply concerned by the findings, which highlight significant gaps in the identification, recording, and reporting of HBA incidents.

Overview of the 2024 Findings: Police data compared to Honour Based Abuse Helpline data

- 1. Drop in Police-Recorded HBA Offences:** Police data shows an 8% drop in recorded HBA offences, falling from 3,008 in 2023 to 2,755 in 2024—the first decrease since these statistics began in 2020. Yet, Karma Nirvana handled 2,962 cases in the same period, a sharp 13% rise from last year. This gap raises serious concerns. The decline in police-recorded incidents, paired with rising reports to Karma Nirvana, points to potential under-reporting or even misclassification by police forces, rather than a true reduction in HBA incidents.
- 2. Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation:** Among the recorded HBA offences, 201 involved forced marriage—a slight increase, even as overall HBA numbers dropped. Additionally, there were 111 Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) cases, with just over half (54%) reported under the mandatory duty to report.

What does the Police recorded data tell us:

1. Identifying and Recording Honour-Based Abuse: Issues with the DARA Tool

Karma Nirvana has long highlighted the critical need for accurate identification and reporting of Honour-Based Abuse (HBA), particularly for statutory professionals. In evidence submitted to the Women and Equality Committee in January 2023, we expressed our significant concerns about the potential regression in the identification of HBA cases as police forces across England and Wales were set to adopt the Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment (DARA) tool. This new risk assessment tool, recommended by the College of Policing for use by all police forces over the last two years, has now replaced the previous DASH risk assessment tool for frontline responders.

Unfortunately, one of the most worrying aspects of the DARA tool is its **lack of a screening question specifically designed to identify Honour-Based Abuse**. Without such a question frontline responders are less likely to recognise potential HBA.

Karma Nirvana raised these concerns with both the Home Office and the College of Policing prior to the implementation of the DARA tool. Unfortunately, no consultation took place regarding the rationale for excluding HBA-specific questions. **This issue is now evident in the latest HBA recorded figures, which reflect the lowest number of reported offences since 2020.**

2. Data Gaps Limit Insights on HBA Impact and Trends

The Home Office HBA dataset lacks key breakdowns by age, gender, and perpetrator patterns, limiting its usefulness for assessing trends and policy impacts. Age-specific data, for instance, would clarify the effects of the recent child marriage legislation, where we would expect increased reporting. Without this, it's difficult to interpret whether the law is raising awareness or improving intervention for potential victims of child marriage.

Similarly, the data ignores information on multiple perpetrators or family-based abuse contexts, both critical aspects of HBA cases. These omissions hinder a full understanding of the communal or familial dynamics that often drive HBA, as well as the scale of the issue among young people. More detailed classifications are essential to provide a clearer, actionable picture of HBA in the UK.

3. Urgency of a Statutory Definition for HBA

The data release reinforces the need for a statutory definition of HBA. In March 2024, Karma Nirvana launched a campaign calling on the government to establish a statutory definition for HBA, a move supported by the wider Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) sector. Such a definition would provide clarity and consistency across police forces, ensuring that HBA offences are more readily identified, reported, and acted upon. This call to action is crucial in light of the challenges highlighted in the data release, as it would set a unified standard for recognising and addressing HBA.

Recommendations Based on 2024 HBA Data Findings

Karma Nirvana's analysis of the 2024 Home Office Honour-Based Abuse (HBA) data highlights key issues in identification, reporting, and data classification of HBA cases. To address these issues, we propose the following recommendations:

1. Review and Amend the Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment (DARA) Tool to Include HBA-Specific Screening

- **Recommendation:** The College of Policing should review the DARA tool to incorporate specific questions or indicators for Honour-Based Abuse. This addition would support frontline police officers in identifying HBA cases, including complex family or cultural dynamics that are often missed.
- **Rationale:** The absence of HBA-specific screening questions in DARA risks under-recognising HBA incidents. This is evidenced in the latest Home Office data statistics. Adding these questions could improve the consistency and accuracy of HBA case identification across police forces.

2. Enhance Data Collection to Include Detailed Demographic and Case-Specific Information

- **Recommendation:** The Home Office should expand the HBA dataset to include age, gender, and details on the relationship between victim and perpetrator(s). This should also cover cases involving multiple perpetrators, and any use of new legislation, such as the child marriage law.
- **Rationale:** Current data gaps limit insight into HBA trends and the effectiveness of recent legislative changes. More granular data would allow for a clearer assessment of how recent policy and legislation, like the child marriage law, have impacted reporting and intervention.

3. Establish a Statutory Definition of Honour-Based Abuse

- **Recommendation:** The UK Government should establish a statutory definition of Honour-Based Abuse, as Karma Nirvana and the wider Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) sector have advocated. This definition should be used universally across all police forces and statutory agencies.
- **Rationale:** A statutory definition would provide a consistent framework for identifying and reporting HBA across all regions, eliminating disparities and ensuring a standardised approach. This clarity would improve recognition, consistency in understanding, and data reliability.

4. Strengthen Training for Police and Frontline Professionals

- **Recommendation:** Resource in mandatory, specialised training for police officers, social workers, and other frontline professionals that focuses on recognising, recording, and responding to Honour-Based Abuse, including forced marriage, FGM, and child marriage.
- **Rationale:** Frontline officers lack a comprehensive understanding of HBA, which contributes to misidentification and inconsistent responses. Targeted training would empower professionals to identify and handle HBA cases appropriately.

Conclusion

In 2015, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) highlighted significant deficiencies in how police forces across England and Wales were handling Honour-Based Abuse (HBA) cases, **noting inconsistent identification, recording, and response practices**. Unfortunately, the recent 2024 data release by the Home Office reveals that **little progress has been made** in addressing these issues. The HMICFRS findings show that, despite nearly a decade passing since those initial concerns were raised, police forces still **struggle with a lack of standardised definitions, insufficient training, and gaps in data collection**—shortcomings that hinder a unified approach to tackling HBA.

These persistent issues are reflected in the 2024 figures, which report an 8% decline in police-recorded HBA offences, even as cases handled by Karma Nirvana rose by 13% in the same period. **This discrepancy suggests possible under-reporting or misclassification by police, rather than a genuine reduction in HBA incidents**. A key factor here is the recent adoption of the Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment (DARA) tool, which replaced the DASH assessment but lacks HBA-specific screening questions. This omission leaves frontline responders without essential indicators to recognise complex HBA dynamics, **increasing the risk of overlooking critical cases**.

The 2024 data release and HMICFRS findings reinforce Karma Nirvana's urgent calls for reform: establishing a statutory definition of HBA, expanding data collection to include age, gender, and familial context, and mandating specialised training for frontline professionals. By addressing these issues, the government can foster a **more consistent, accurate, and compassionate response to HBA**, ensuring that victims receive the support they need and that police forces are held accountable in their duty to protect.